

PUBLIC SAFETY



PRESS RELEASE

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Blunt's Executive Departments Warn of Safety Issues Related to Recent Storm

JEFFERSON CITY, July 21, 2006—The wide-scale power outages in Eastern Missouri has the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Health and Senior Services warning Missourians the potential dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning associated with the gasoline or diesel generators.

“The first symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning usually include headache, lightheadedness, dizziness and unexplained sleepiness, said Julie Eckstein, Director Department of Health and Senior Services. “Persons should not wait for these signs, however, since at higher concentrations these symptoms may not occur, or may occur so rapidly that the victim does not have enough time to react.”

All gasoline and diesel generators create carbon monoxide, a colorless, odorless, tasteless gas that inhibits the body's ability to absorb oxygen, a condition that can cause serious health problems, and even death, within a matter of minutes. More than 1,500 Americans die each year from accidental carbon monoxide poisoning.

- Generators should only be used outdoors where there is adequate ventilation. Generators should be placed where the exhaust will not collect in one area or flow into a structure through open doors or windows.
- Gas and charcoal grills, including camping stoves also generate carbon monoxide. The same caution should be applied when using them for cooking.

Other symptoms of exposure may include an inability to concentrate, memory loss, and loss of coordination. Chest pain, irregular heartbeat and heart attack are also possible. Infants, the elderly, smokers, and individuals with heart disease are at special risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Additionally, State Fire Marshal Randy Cole is concerned that households without power may have family members using candles and other open flame light sources such as lanterns in their homes. The improper use of candles can create a substantial fire hazard.

“While I do not recommend the use of candles as an emergency light source, I would caution those using candles to remember to use basic safety rules to minimize the risk of fire,” Cole said.

Some basic safety tips for candles and open flame light sources include:

- Never leave an unattended candle burning.
- Always supervise children around candles and open flames.
- Make sure candles are kept away from flammable objects such as curtains, paper and cabinetry.
- Candles should be only use on a sturdy, flat surface to minimize the risk of tipping.
- If large quantities of candles are used in an enclosed area, the risk of carbon monoxide also becomes a concern.

In times of power outages, the use of candles and open flame light sources are the single greatest fire risk factor in homes.

For more information about carbon monoxide poisoning and fire safety please contact the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, Bureau of Environmental Epidemiology, at (573) 751-6102, or visit our website at www.dhss.mo.gov/CO/ or the Missouri State Fire Marshal’s Office at 573-751-2930, or visit our website at www.dfs.dps.mo.gov.

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